

VZCZCXRO6171  
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #0171/01 0331040  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P R 021040Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9529  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1920  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0013  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 1118

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000171

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [TI](#)  
SUBJECT: TAJIK FOREIGN MINISTER ZARIPOV'S BILATERAL WISH LIST FOR 2007

REF: (A) DUSHANBE 44, (B) DUSHANBE 34

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11. (SBU) Summary: Foreign Minister Zaripov invited Ambassador February 1 to meet newly-appointed Ambassador to the United States Abdujabbor Shirinov, and to discuss his ideas for additional cooperation in 2007, including the opening of the U.S.-funded bridge at Nizhnii Pyanzh and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Ambassador raised the upcoming International Visitors program for senior bankers and expressed hope for positive results from a related meeting between Gerald Metals, Orienbank owner and "First Brother-in-Law" Sadulloyev, and the Deputy Director of the TadaZ aluminum smelter in February in Washington. She also asked for the Minister's help in registering the National Democratic Institute and Freedom House, both of which would contribute to Tajikistan's Millennium Challenge aspirations. Zaripov provided some information on President Rahmonov's international travels, and asked for U.S. assistance in closing down a U.S. based website he claimed was run as an "active measure" by Russian security services aimed at disrupting U.S. relations with the countries of Central Asia. End Summary.

New Ambassador

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12. (SBU) "Increase U.S. investment in Tajikistan and opportunities for Tajik students to study in the United States." Shirinov plans to arrive in Washington mid-February and hopes to participate in the White House credentials ceremony February 127. (Note: We conveyed to the Ministry today that Shirinov needs to be in Washington no later than February 13 to be included in the ceremony.)

Zaripov's Wish List

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13. (SBU) Zaripov again raised Tajikistan's interest in making the list of Millennium Challenge countries, and said this would be a top priority for Shirinov. Ambassador said success was not an issue of lobbying, but rather taking concrete steps to improve Tajikistan's indicators. Registration of the National Democratic Institute and Freedom House would be positive developments in the "governing justly" section of the indicators, especially as Freedom House has some responsibility for the rankings. Zaripov said he was working with both the Ministry of Justice and State Committee on Security to move forward on the National Democratic Institute, but asked

Ambassador to raise the issue at her meetings with the Minister of Justice and Director of Security. Ambassador noted that the new Minister of Justice had thus far declined to meet. (Note: This is as clear a statement as we have heard that the State Committee on National Security, long thought to be the main obstacle to the National Democratic Institute's work, is in fact the real problem).

14. (SBU) Zaripov again raised his interest in a splashy ceremony for the bridge opening in August, including senior U.S. representation. He is also hoping to generate increased U.S. investment, noting the recent visit to Tajikistan of U.S.-listed energy company Canargo, which has received a concession to explore the possibility of extracting natural gas in Kurgan-Tube, and to generate more educational exchanges. "Maybe in the future, we will have budgetary funds to send more students to the United States, as they do in Kazakhstan. But for now we still need your help."

Travelling Man

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15. (SBU) Zaripov characterized Rahmonov's recent trip to China as extremely positive, not only for the various commercial and educational agreements signed, but for the overall "umbrella" agreement on friendship and cooperation that will stimulate rapid development in the relationship. (Note: Zaripov didn't share any figures on the new concessional loan agreements reached with China, but International Monetary Fund representatives told us this week that they are on the order of hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars, potentially raising Tajikistan's Debt to Gross Domestic Product ratio to as high as 60 percent. End Note.) Rahmonov will travel to Egypt February 4 and Syria three days later for meetings with his counterparts. According to Zaripov, Rahmonov wants not only to build bilateral relations with countries in the Arab world, but also to share his experience in "peacefully resolving civil conflicts and working cooperatively with difficult neighbors."

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Shut Down that Pesky Website

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16. (SBU) Zaripov raised the Arianastorm.com website, which he claims is based in Newcastle, Delaware. According to Zaripov, Ibrahim Ismoyilov, who was the deputy state security committee chief for Tajikistan during Soviet times, runs the site with four students he had recruited from Isfara, "a hotbed of Islamic extremists." Ismoyilov receives his instructions from opposition journalist Atabuloyev in Moscow, a known Russian Federal Security Service agent of influence, whom Moscow uses to destabilize relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and also to curb the growth of U.S. influence in Central Asia in general. Zaripov was particularly incensed about stories that he personally is an "agent of the Central Intelligence Agency." Ambassador noted that the U.S. government does not control information published on the internet, to which Zaripov responded that "the U.S. Justice Department has the right to close down any website under the Patriot Act." Ambassador said this is only true for websites promoting violence and terrorism. (Note: We feel Zaripov's pain; our embassy has also been the subject of some nasty attacks from this website.)

17. (SBU) Comment: We appreciate Department's assistance in getting Shirinov included in the upcoming White House credentials ceremony. We expect that Zaripov will still play the lead role for the Tajik side in driving the bilateral relationship. Our challenge is to turn his enthusiasm and ideas into concrete steps forward. End Comment.  
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